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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of beginning teacher support programs, noting that the attrition rate for beginning teachers is extremely high. Support programs can help schools and districts improve teacher retention rates by enhancing new teacher satisfaction. Support for beginning teachers can include personal and emotional support; task- or problem-focused support; and critical reflection on teaching experience. Low-intensity support strategies include providing orientation for new teachers, matching beginning and veteran teachers, adjusting working conditions, and promoting collegial collaboration. High-intensity support strategies include selecting and training effective support providers, providing release time, using mini-courses to address common challenges, and examining the evidence. Additional strategies from abroad include networking new teachers and using group observation and advice. Institutional policies and practices that strengthen beginning teacher support efforts include early identification of beginning teachers by the personnel office, realistic expectations for beginners, cooperative agreements with unions, coordination of efforts, and release time. Inevitable challenges for support programs include choosing and preparing support providers, providing time for support activities, managing the relationship between beginning teacher support and beginning teacher evaluation, and getting resources to struggling teachers. (SM)

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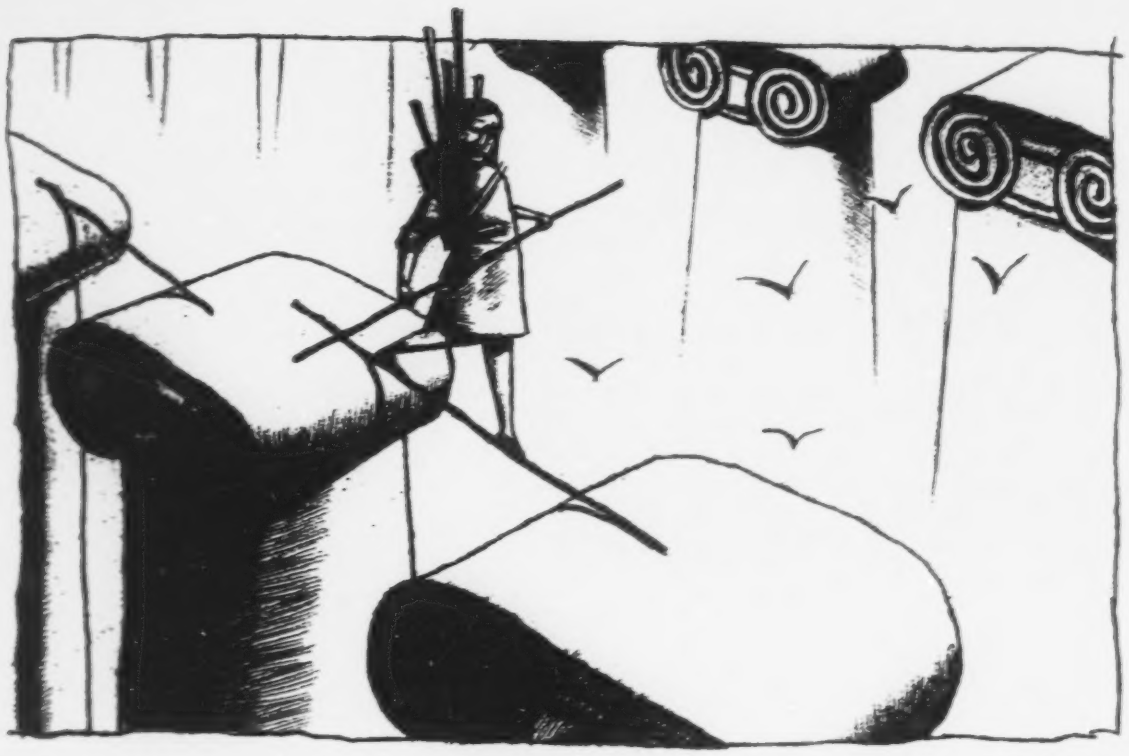

Whitney Sherman

Lifelines to the classroom:

DESIGNING SUPPORT for BEGINNING TEACHERS

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SP 039 582

A third of beginning teachers quit within their first three years on the job. We don't stand for this kind of dropout rate among students, and we can no longer afford it in our teaching ranks. But what does it take to adequately support novice teachers? What lifelines can we offer so they will remain in the profession and develop into highly effective classroom educators?

In education, as in any employment area, each year produces a certain number of newly minted professionals. But due to the particular circumstances of our time, the annual influx of newcomers to the teaching profession needs to rise dramatically in the coming decade. On one side of the profession's complex supply-demand equation is a fast dwindling reservoir of our most highly experienced teachers. Hired in large numbers in the 1960s and '70s to teach a booming student population, these veterans have started reaching the natural end of their careers. One increasingly typical result is the experience of a San Francisco elementary school that, last year, lost all three of its kindergarten teachers to retirement.

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On the demand side of the equation is an expanding student population, coinciding with a proliferation of class-size reduction initiatives that require schools to lower their teacher-student ratio in certain grades. Many urban and rural schools, scrambling to hire coverage for additional classrooms, have had difficulty finding enough fully credentialled teachers. As a result, many students are being taught by someone with an emergency teaching credential.

Further complicating the picture is the profession's ongoing "brain drain," the steady loss of teachers who, after a relatively short time in the classroom, give up on the profession, opting instead for jobs that offer more financial reward or may simply appear less stressful.

By one estimate, U.S. schools will need to hire anywhere from 1.7 to 2.7 million new teachers within the next decade (Hussar, 1999). Others argue that the numbers are far smaller. But either way, many districts and schools throughout the country can look forward to a significant influx of new teachers in the coming years — a situation that presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge, of course, is to give these newcomers the kind of support needed if they are not only to remain in the profession, but to develop into the kinds of educators able to teach to today's high standards. The definition of effective teaching has changed greatly in recent years. Today's teachers are expected to help the most diverse student population in our history meet the highest education standards we have ever set. And, in the process, they are expected to serve *all* students equally well.

The opportunity lies in the fact that updating old skills or unlearning old habits — a necessity for many veterans — is not an issue for these fresh-on-the-scene teachers. Still in the early stages of learning their craft, they have the opportunity to begin their careers using the best of what we know from research and practice about effective teaching.

Beginning teacher support programs, also referred to as teacher induction programs, can help schools and districts meet this challenge and take advantage of the opportunity it presents. Minimally, such programs can improve teacher retention rates by enhancing new teacher satisfaction. More importantly, a well-designed and implemented effort can improve practice, helping new educators apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in their teacher preparation programs to the complexity of real-life teaching. Not incidentally, such support programs can also serve as a drawing card in the increasingly competitive market for hiring new teachers.

Some educators have also come to think of beginning teacher support as a simple fairness issue. One district superintendent now working with the local teachers' union to develop a support program explains its genesis: "We'd been hiring a lot of new teachers, expecting a lot, and then holding them accountable *after* the fact — when we evaluated them at the end of the year. The list of things new teachers are expected to know and be able to do has only grown in recent years, but they usually don't get any attendant support."

A great deal of research literature documents the extent to which beginning teachers struggle in their early classroom years. Veenman's (1984) classic international review of perceived problems among beginning teachers found remarkable consistency, across both time and differently structured education systems. Among the greatest challenges perceived by rookie teachers were classroom management, motivation of students, dealing with the individual differences among students, assessing student work, and relations with parents.

In a current international study funded by the National Science Foundation, WestEd researchers Ted Britton and Senta Raizen, along with Lynn Paine of Michigan State University, are finding that, in countries as different as China, New Zealand, and Switzerland, today's new teachers express these very same problems as being the most pressing difficulties they face (Britton, Paine, & Raizen, 1999).

In teaching, new entrants, fresh out of professional training, assume the exact same responsibilities as 20-year veterans. In doing so, they are also undertaking a remarkably complex endeavor, involving as it does the simultaneous management of multiple variables, including student behavior, intellectual engagement, student interaction, materials, physical space, and time. While many novice teachers have had terrific intellectual preparation and an outstanding student teaching experience, their limited experience generally yields an equally limited repertoire of classroom strategies — far more limited than the variety of teaching challenges a new teacher invariably encounters. It's a situation ripe for frustration.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the attrition rate for beginning teachers has always been extremely high, with nearly a third of novice teachers leaving the profession within their first three years. Inner-city and rural schools find it especially hard to retain teachers. This revolving door creates a permanent core of inexperienced teachers who are learning their craft by, essentially, practicing on the students before them. At the schoolwide level, high teacher turnover drains energy and resources as well, requiring that administrators and teaching colleagues constantly focus on bringing newcomers up to speed on everything from operating the copy machine to participating in major reform efforts.

> Good support improves the likelihood that new teachers will stay the course.

When new teachers turn away from their profession, their years of teacher preparation are rendered useless, a waste both of their personal resources and of the governmental resources that subsidize such training. At the same time, of course, their departure further exacerbates existing teacher shortages.

The 1980s and '90s generated a growing number of teacher induction programs aimed at helping beginning teachers make a successful transition from their teacher preparation experience to being the teacher-of-record in a classroom. Among the common goals of such programs are:

- improving teaching performance;
- increasing the retention of promising beginning teachers;
- promoting the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers;
- satisfying mandated requirements for induction and/or licensure; and
- transmitting the culture of the system to beginning teachers (Huling-Austin, 1990).

Most such programs identify beginning teachers as those who are either fresh out of a teacher preparation program or who have been teaching only one or two years. But, increasingly, districts and schools recognize the need to also offer some degree of support for teachers who, while not new to the classroom per se, are new to the school, the district, or the state.

For districts or schools undertaking — or expanding — an organized support effort for beginning teachers, it helps to understand the range of strategies that have been tried in the past and what the available data, limited as they are, suggest about the effectiveness of such strategies. This brief outlines the general types of support that can be offered to beginning teachers, strategies of varying intensity for offering such support, institutional conditions that increase the effectiveness of these strategies, and typical challenges in the implementation of teacher induction programs. (Note: This brief focuses on support for teachers who have completed a formal preparation program, not on the increasing number of "alternative-route" teachers who have been hired without such preparation and are expected to receive their initial teacher training while on the job.)

Types of Support

Beginning teacher support should be looked at as a continuum, starting with personal and emotional support, expanding to include specific task- or problem-related support and, in the ideal, expanding further to help the newcomer develop a capacity for critical self-reflection on teaching practice. Each aspect of support serves a different purpose.

Personal and Emotional Support

The first years of teaching are especially stressful as beginning teachers face the emotional challenges of adapting to a new workplace and new colleagues — from simply figuring out where things are located to learning policies and procedures, finding kindred spirits, and, generally speaking, getting the lay of the land. Fatigue is another constant for new teachers. "Free" time during their official workday is scarce, and planning and other preparation invariably spills over into their personal time. The effort of planning every lesson from scratch, teaching with unfamiliar materials, and, often, teaching at an unfamiliar grade level drains even the most energetic new teachers. Compounding all this is the inherent isolation of individual teachers sequestered in their individual classrooms.

At this emotionally challenging time, more experienced colleagues can play an important role, serving as a sounding board and assuring beginners that their experience is normal, offering sympathy and perspective, and providing advice to help reduce the inevitable stress. While this type of support does little to directly improve teaching performance, it does much to promote beginning teachers' personal and professional well-being and to transmit the culture of teaching. In the process, such support also improves the likelihood that new teachers will stay the course long enough to have the *opportunity* to become more effective teachers.

> Critical self-reflection can lead directly to improved learning in a new teacher's classroom.

Task- or Problem-Focused Support

Beginning teachers also need help in knowing how to approach new tasks and in solving specific problems that crop up in their teaching. They are usually undertaking even the most basic teaching tasks for the very first time: developing lesson plans, planning what to say at back-to-school night, deciding what goes in the gradebook to determine grades at the end of nine weeks, and structuring parent-teacher conferences. Seasoned teachers can guide beginners in planning and accomplishing these tasks effectively; with the help of a veteran teacher, the beginner doesn't have to reinvent the wheel for such standard activities. Veterans can also share the sometimes-unwritten expectations associated with such tasks in a given school, district, or state.

In similar fashion, attentive mentors can alert new teachers to the customs of the broader school community — everything from expectations about how quiet the corridors should be when students pass between classes to the prevailing expectations of local parents regarding parent participation in the classroom. For example, in one school, teachers might consider the faculty lounge completely off-limits to parents, while at another the lounge might double as a meeting room for parent-teacher conferences. While such conventions might not be "make-or-break" issues for new teachers, understanding them can go a long way toward making life easier.

Beginning teachers also need help in dealing with teaching challenges specific to their own students: What materials are appropriate for Maria who always finishes the assigned tasks early? What can be done to help Jeff, a special needs student, and Ming Lee, an English learner, while keeping the rest of the class productively engaged? And what can be tried when a new teacher has exhausted his or her repertoire for teaching students how to add fractions — when, for example, manipulatives, pictures, and even step-by-step instruction have achieved only limited success? By looking at such challenges from

the perspective of experience or by drawing from a larger repertoire of instructional strategies and materials, veteran teachers can help beginners identify a larger range of possible solutions. This type of problem-specific support can improve teaching performance in specific instances and, as a by-product, reduce new teachers' stress levels.

Critical Reflection on Teaching Practice

Veterans' support in dealing with specific problems can help beginners expand their repertoire of strategies — from instructional delivery to classroom management to assessment — and help broaden the perspective from which newcomers view problems. But problem-specific support may do little to foster rookie teachers' independent problem-solving abilities. If teachers are to become skilled at independently identifying and addressing the idiosyncratic learning problems of their students, they must learn to reflect critically on student work, as well as on their own teaching practices.

Efforts to support such self-reflection often start out with a relatively directive approach. In some instances, veteran teachers may need to help identify and then prioritize issues that warrant new teachers' reflection. Left to their own devices, novices may not even recognize the most pressing issues on which to focus their attention.

For beginners who have not developed the habit of reflecting on their own teaching, the veteran may model self-reflection: identifying a problem and proposing and analyzing *for* the beginner a variety of solutions. In doing so, the veteran can help the beginner think in terms of being guided by evidence, for example, how will you *know* that your students have learned what you're trying to teach? Then, as the novice begins to develop more self-confidence and efficacy, the veteran may continue to propose solutions, but prompt the beginning teacher to analyze them himself or herself. Eventually, the beginner will be expected to autonomously propose and analyze various options for addressing a particular issue. Over time, the veteran reduces the amount of guidance offered and engages more as an interested and sympathetic colleague, shifting from a directive to collaborative to facilitative role.

The overall aim is to build beginning teachers' autonomous ability to prioritize the most challenging aspects of their teaching experience; consider alternative approaches to dealing with a given challenge; identify and analyze the evidence that provides the most information about a particular problem; and consider alternative solutions that can be quickly implemented. (One specific and well-known technique for providing this type of support is "cognitive coaching.") In the short run, beginning teachers profit by solving *particular* problems; but in the long run, they profit by knowing how to think constructively about *any* problem that comes up in their teaching.

The critical self-reflection engendered by this type of coaching can lead directly to improved teaching and learning in the beginning teacher's classroom. In the best-case scenario, such coaching can also have a broader impact, fostering in both coach and new teacher a bent toward action-oriented collegial discussion. When a critical mass of teachers at one school are comfortable talking with each other about their teaching, the school's capacity to identify and address problems in student learning and other important issues rises dramatically. This kind of dialogue allows everyone at the school to transcend the details of individual classrooms and to see the big picture of what's going on at a school or across a particular grade level. One teacher who notices that her fifth graders don't understand place value may assume the problem is idiosyncratic to her classroom. But when all the fifth-grade teachers at a school come together to discuss teaching and learning in their classrooms and realize that a disproportionate number of their students don't understand place value, the school can more effectively address both the immediate problem and its causes.

Specific Support Strategies

New-teacher support programs may be operated by school districts or by consortia of districts, either on their own or, sometimes, in partnership or association with the local teachers association. A state department of education may also offer a beginning teacher support model, as is true of California, which provides some implementation funding as well. But schools can also do much on their own. One Nevada high school principal, who has implemented a fairly complex teacher induction program at her school, notes, "we can do most of the things we need to do to support our new teachers with only the tacit support of the district — although it would be nice to have its active involvement."

The amount of resources schools and districts are able and willing to devote to beginning teacher support varies, of course. Some states give districts funds specifically for teacher induction programs or for a specific type of mentor teacher program in which mentor responsibilities focus on beginning teacher support rather than on curriculum development or special projects, for example. Often, mentor monies are used to release mentor teachers from their own classrooms part time, but some districts have found it more effective to target the funds differently. In California, for example, the state has given waivers that allow a district to support a smaller number of mentor teachers but have each of them work full time to support new teachers. Veteran teachers who do not have to balance both classroom and mentoring responsibilities have more time to focus on the beginning teachers, are more flexible, and, often, can respond to problems in a more timely way.

Not surprisingly, the amount of available funding often affects the choice of activities that are included in a teacher induction program. Some activities are low intensity and relatively low cost, being either one-shot or low-frequency events. As such, they require short-term but focused coordination. Others are higher intensity, tend to be costlier, require sustained attention, and, often, must be coordinated with other school or district activities.

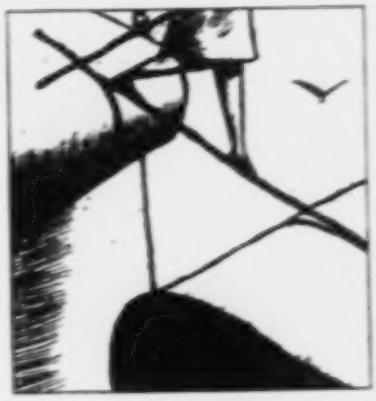
Low-Intensity Support Strategies

Low-intensity support strategies make minimal demands on district and school resources. Some are simply procedural, such as providing formal orientation or protecting new teachers from extracurricular responsibilities. Others require the involvement of veteran teachers in mentoring or collegial roles. When veteran teachers' involvement can be structured in ways that do not impinge on their regular teaching time — in grade-level meetings, for example — districts consider such strategies to be low intensity. Even strategies that pay stipends are considered low intensity so long as the veterans are not pulled from their classrooms. Beginning teachers, on the other hand, experience even low- intensity efforts as highly valuable when those strategies feature lots of contact with veteran teachers, contact that generally provides personal or emotional support and that helps them address the unfamiliar tasks and problems they encounter as first-time teachers. Studies suggest that such support from veteran teachers results in higher job satisfaction and higher retention rates for beginning teachers (Dianda et al., 1991; Wong-Park, 1997).

All of the activities below qualify as low-intensity support and can be implemented in some form by a school with little or no district involvement or funding.

Orienting new teachers. The week before school, beginning teachers receive a formal orientation to the community, district, curriculum, and school. One district uses school buses to give a tour of the community, with special attention to community agencies and the neighborhoods where students live. Orientation is also an opportunity to give an overview of curricular and school/district philosophy, share special emphases for the year, and point out important features of curriculum materials. Some districts include advice on setting up the classroom and/or classroom management. Also helpful are booklets or other handouts that document in ready form some important information, such as district policies or a calendar of key events.

Matching beginning and veteran teachers. The pairing of a beginning teacher with a veteran teacher is a hallmark of most teacher induction programs. Whether this pairing is considered to be a low- or high-intensity effort depends on the degree of support the veteran teacher is expected to provide. In low-intensity programs, the experienced teacher is likely to function primarily as a buddy or, as one superintendent describes it, "a cheerleader," providing emotional support. In many such instances, the veteran teacher receives no release time and, therefore, doesn't have the opportunity to actually observe the new teacher in action. Even so, some offer enormous amounts of time and attention, often well beyond that for which they are compensated — assuming they receive any compensation at all.



Typically, novice teachers are urged to contact the veterans with any problems that arise. But some beginners are reluctant to bring problems to the attention of their support providers, either because they are embarrassed or because they don't want to be a burden, especially if novices know that the providers are receiving little or no compensation. Any type of pairing strategy is strengthened when the veteran teacher receives a stipend and the pair is expected to set aside a regular time each week to meet together. Studies suggest that without regular, structured time set aside, paired teachers have less interaction. Matching the pair by grade level or content area also increases both the likelihood of regular interaction and the effectiveness of the support.

Clarification of veteran teachers' responsibilities is important. One Arizona school district operates both a one-on-one "buddy" program and a mentor program. In the low-intensity buddy program, new teachers are matched with veteran teachers whose job it is to "show them the ropes," such as how to obtain supplies or send down the lunch count. By contrast, mentors must be endorsed by their principals as "master teachers," and they are trained in specific coaching techniques. In this high-intensity program, mentors are then matched with and receive release time to observe and work with several new teachers.

Adjusting working conditions. Unless specific administrative steps are taken to protect them, beginning teachers often end up with the toughest assignments. To make life less stressful for them, administrators can reduce the number of students in beginners' classrooms, refrain from assigning them the most challenging students, and minimize their extracurricular and committee assignments. At the elementary school level, in particular, administrators can avoid assigning combination grades. At the secondary school level, administrators can make sure that new teachers' course schedules require as few separate preparation efforts as possible. They can also avoid assigning schedules that require new teachers to change classrooms during the day. In this era of tight resources, it must also be said that beginning teachers, especially, suffer when classrooms are not adequately stocked with textbooks, desks, supplementary materials, and basic supplies.

Given the abundance of school reform efforts, a common hazard for today's beginning teachers is the sheer number of professional development activities in which they're expected to participate. At one California school, for example, beginning teachers have been expected to participate in regularly scheduled workshops aimed specifically at beginning teachers, in intensive early literacy training over several weeks, and in weekly staffwide discussions about how to collaborate with a university in transforming their school into a professional development school. The importance of each of these specific activities notwithstanding, the demands of so many commitments can be tiring even for veteran teachers; for beginners they can be overwhelming, undermining both the effectiveness and morale of a teacher.

Principals can protect beginning teachers from getting spread too thin by helping them prioritize their time spent in professional development and by excusing them from all but the most essential activities. They can also help beginning teachers choose and focus on a single, important theme, such as literacy instruction in the example above, that might run through multiple events.

Promoting collegial collaboration. Some schools have existing structures that foster collaboration between beginning and veteran teachers, such as grade-level teams that coordinate instructional planning. Such teams provide some degree of structure and support for beginners who are just learning how to plan curriculum and instruction. For some schools, class size reduction has ended up creating another natural opportunity for ongoing collaboration between veteran and novice teachers. Rather than creating multiple classes with 20 students each, schools with limited space often respond to class-size-reduction mandates by forming one class of 40 taught by two teachers. When one of those two is a veteran and the other a beginner, it's an ideal opportunity for a mentor-like relationship. Principals can also simply ask a veteran teacher to plan together with a beginner who is teaching the same grade or the same course. At the secondary school level, this joint planning can be facilitated by common prep periods.

> Sometimes fixated on the need to improve, beginners must be reminded of their strengths.

Study groups focused on specific topics, such as using running records or improving mathematics instruction, provide beginning teachers with collaborative problem-solving models. In such groups, novices hear how veteran teachers think about using and adapting instructional techniques.

It's helpful to remember that beginning teachers can also serve as important resources for a school. New teachers may well know more than veteran teachers about certain instructional approaches, having studied new techniques in their teacher preparation coursework and used them in student teaching. In certain disciplines — the sciences, for example — a new teacher may also have more current content knowledge than a colleague who has been teaching for 10 or 15 years. Here, again, collaboration profits everyone.

High-Intensity Support Strategies

Research from the California New Teacher Project, a varied set of induction programs, indicates that high-intensity support strategies, such as those described below, are more effective than the less intensive strategies at improving beginning teaching performance (Dianda et al., 1991). For this research, teaching performance was measured on a number of dimensions, including the complexity of academic assignments, percentage of students engaged, long-term planning of curriculum and instruction, range of instructional materials used, use of state/district guidelines and frameworks, and ability to reflect on teaching practices.

As with low-intensity efforts, here, too, veteran teachers are a key ingredient. In high-intensity support efforts, however, much more is expected of them. But if they are to operate as anything more than buddies or cheerleaders, they must be chosen carefully, receive appropriate training, and be given adequate time away from their own classroom responsibilities — all of which requires a greater commitment on the part of the school or district.

Selecting and training effective support providers. Minimally, support providers should be teachers who are successful in their own classrooms and articulate about their practice. But these are only minimum requirements. Because working with beginning teachers is different from working with children and youth, even the most outstanding K-12 teacher is not automatically suited by skill or temperament to collegial work with other adults. Regarding temperament, for example, some extremely

competent teachers seem to forget how long it took them to develop into such effective practitioners. They find it difficult to appropriately downshift their expectations when working with beginning teachers who, with rare exception, cannot possibly teach as well as highly skilled 20-year veterans. Some experienced teachers, accustomed to having their students do what they ask, also find it frustrating to work with adults, who may or may not follow the guidance they offer.

However, if they are temperamentally suited to mentoring, many potential support providers can profit from training in observation — skills and specific strategies for working with adults. In cognitive coaching, for example, teachers learn to initiate collegial conversations rather than combative exchanges and to support colleagues in constructing and extending their own analysis of a teaching or learning event. Support providers also benefit from training in how to collect and analyze the different types of evidence that provide insight into the degree of learning taking place in a classroom and, therefore, the effectiveness of the teaching.

Support providers must also recognize the importance of helping beginners identify and understand their teaching strengths. Beginners — and especially the more perceptive beginners — often become fixated on the areas in which they need to improve, losing sight of those things that are working well in their classrooms. Recognizing and understanding their successes not only provides an enormous boost in confidence, but helps beginning teachers build on those strengths.

Providing release time. Release time can be used in a number of ways to support beginning teachers. For starters, the beginning teachers themselves can be released to attend seminars, to work with support providers to analyze their students' work and the instruction it reflects, or to observe other teachers for a specific purpose. Support providers can also be released from their own teaching duties to provide demonstration lessons in beginners' classrooms, which allows novices to see how certain techniques might be used with their own students. Veteran teachers might also use their release time to simply observe beginning teachers in action and document issues for later discussion. All of these professional development activities and more are used in New Zealand, where the national government provides funding that requires schools to provide 0.2 release time for every new teacher along with a locally developed program to develop their abilities (Britton, Paine, & Raizen, 1999).

Schools with a number of beginning-veteran teacher pairs sometimes use a "roving sub" who moves from classroom to classroom, releasing classroom teachers for an hour or two of focused work. Another option is for support providers to work half time with beginning teachers and half time in classrooms they share with another teacher who wants to work only half time.

Interactive journals shared by veteran and beginner pairs can facilitate communication between them, while reducing the amount of face-to-face time they need. Veterans use the journal to document classroom observations and to raise issues for reflection and later discussion. Beginners can use it to respond in turn or to pose questions, which the veterans can then address in the journal as well. Such journals may be kept in written form in notebooks or orally, using a small tape recorder.

Mini-courses addressing common challenges. Many of the issues that frustrate, stymie, or simply scare beginning teachers are predictable. Some, such as planning for back-to-school night or parent conferences, are relatively easy to address in a quick workshop. Others, such as student discipline, teaching English language learners, and assessment, are thornier and worthy of more attention.

Schools and districts can offer mini-courses or seminars during release time, after school, in the evening, or on weekends, either on their own or in

partnership with universities, county offices of education, or a consortium of small districts. One Arizona district holds a five-day "rookie camp" in the week before school starts. When universities are involved, they can package a series of seminars that earn district credit or credit toward a master's degree. In fact, the same Arizona district that sponsors a rookie camp also has a partnership with the local university, which has developed its master's program in education based, in part, on the content needed by district teachers.

Mini-courses and seminars are most effective when beginning teachers receive support in applying the knowledge learned. Opportunities for relevant role play can be built into the course. Participants can also develop action plans for applying their new knowledge, and those plans can then be critiqued by their classmates. If support providers also attend the mini-course or are informed of its contents, they can then provide relevant support as beginners start applying what they have learned.

Examining the evidence. Veteran teachers can help beginners collect evidence of their teaching practice and analyze it to identify both strengths and areas for improvement. This strategy is most effective when the veteran and beginner pairs take a particular focus, either on a classroom problem or perhaps on competencies the beginner is expected to exhibit. Evidence may come from a veteran's observations of a beginner's interactions with his or her own students, from joint analysis of student work, or even from an examination of the arrangement of classroom materials and furniture. Universities can often provide training or expertise in collecting and interpreting evidence, such as through observation or portfolio documentation. In some instances, universities collaborate with districts by actually conducting the observations to provide evidence. Often, an examination of evidence results in a professional development plan for the beginning teacher, with activities targeted to specific areas of growth.

> An excellent classroom teacher does not necessarily translate into an excellent support provider.

The natural question that comes up when analyzing evidence of teaching competency is, of course, "what competency are we talking about?" Teaching standards adopted by a state or district identify expected competencies, although rarely at a beginning level. As an articulation of what experienced teachers should know and be able to do, such standards alone are not especially helpful for the novice. However, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium publishes a model set of standards that are widely used by teacher preparation programs. These standards are intended to serve as a basis for discussion and adaptation by states, but can also be adapted to district needs.

The California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers, now being piloted in that state, goes further, providing rubrics, or performance levels, for each competency. These rubrics can help the beginner and the veteran interpret the evidence they collect regarding the beginner's own practices. The rubrics also provide solid ideas about what's reasonable to expect for the teacher's next stage of development. In setting goals for the beginning teacher, it's important that they be challenging, but also attainable. Teacher assessment instruments, such as the California Teaching Portfolio, developed by WestEd, or Pathwise, developed by the Educational Testing Service, also have rubrics built into them. *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, provides competencies, suggested evidence, and criteria that can be used to guide the collection and interpretation of evidence. Helping beginning teachers collect and analyze evidence related to the effectiveness of their teaching has high potential for promoting reflective

teaching practice and for improving teaching performance. But, as noted before, it's important that veteran teachers receive training in strategies for collecting and interpreting evidence, in talking about evidence with a beginner, and in understanding the teaching competencies and criteria used. This type of support also helps pinpoint the areas in which assistance should be targeted for a struggling beginner. While some argue that dealing with evidence can be too overwhelming for a new teacher, this strategy can succeed if the veteran is sensitive to the individual beginner's capacity for processing information and provides commensurate support for assisting growth in the identified areas.

Additional Strategies From Abroad

The United States is not alone in its tendency to put new teachers into place without much support. Among 13 countries recognized as having good mathematics and science education, researchers recently found that 9 provide no or negligible support for new teachers (Britton, Paine, & Raizen, 1999). However, in 4 countries concerted policies, programs, and practices are in place to develop beginning teachers. These efforts include all of the above-mentioned strategies, as well as some other approaches that remain largely untried in the United States.

Networking new teachers. In some Swiss states, districts arrange for new teachers to organize across schools into reflective practice groups. A group meets twice a month with an experienced teacher who is extensively trained to facilitate members' exploration of the perennial problems of novice teachers. In New Zealand, regional teacher centers convene new teachers for one to two workshops, in which they can exchange views on problems, break through their isolation, and get "safe" advice from experts who are not associated with their districts.

Group observation and advice. In Japan, all teachers — including new ones — are asked to periodically prepare and deliver a best possible lesson to their students while being observed by many colleagues (Padilla, Riley & Bryan, 1999). While this may feel like an especially pressured situation for a new teacher, most novices subsequently find that the advice and critique from the rest of the faculty is tremendously helpful for their growth.

Institutional Role in Beginning Teacher Support

Certain institutional policies and practices strengthen all beginning teacher support efforts — starting with having an effective method for identifying new teachers and maintaining realistic expectations for these newcomers.

Early identification of beginning teachers by the personnel office. Few personnel offices are set up to formally identify new teachers (whether new to the profession, the state, or the district) and provide that information to their principals or to the coordinator of an induction program. Early identification does, however, aid in planning for specific support activities, such as orientation. It also allows support to begin much earlier in the year.

Realistic expectations for beginners. It takes time for teachers to learn their craft. Induction programs can accelerate beginning teacher growth, but most newcomers will still need an extended period before they look like strong veteran teachers. Yet most teacher evaluation systems do not distinguish between beginning and veteran teachers. No one wants to see incompetent teachers in classrooms, but in this era of rising expectations, care must be taken that beginning teachers are not continually hired and then let go in the name of raising standards. Sustained investment of support in beginning teachers who are consistently improving their teaching is a wise policy, especially for districts that are at a disadvantage in hiring teachers.

Cooperative agreements with unions. While teacher unions and associations are generally supportive of teacher induction practices, they are wary of setting any undesirable precedents. For example, because issues related to compensation for time spent in required activities are important to all teachers, teacher representatives may also want to negotiate clear limits to the amount of uncompensated time contributed by veteran teachers and beginning teachers in the course of a support program. They are also typically interested in how support providers are selected, especially if a stipend is involved. Having union representatives participate in the planning of support programs or discussion of particularly thorny issues ahead of time can help avoid grievances and divisive struggles.

Coordination of efforts. Even when adopting low-intensity support strategies, a district or school needs someone who is paying attention to implementation, dealing with obstacles, and ensuring consistency with other district policies. Whether considering beginning teacher orientations, seminars, coursework, or even pairing beginners with veteran teachers, someone with administrative authority must lay the groundwork. Dates and facilities must be scheduled to avoid conflicts with other school and district activities. Veteran teachers who are willing to work with beginners must be identified, recruited, and trained. Both support and training for these mentors must be ongoing. If the support strategies for beginning teachers are planned at a district level, someone needs to ensure that principals are aware of the nature, timing, and purpose of the various activities. Experience suggests that this is unlikely to happen unless the person responsible for doing all this also has a realistic amount of time set aside for it.

> When keeping new teacher support and new teacher evaluation separate, confidentiality is critical.

Release time. Protected time makes it more likely that classroom observations will take place, that veterans and beginners will actually meet and have discussions that are not rushed, and that beginners will attend seminars at times when fatigue does not interfere with their ability to pay attention. The creative use of substitutes and staff development days can enhance the effectiveness of support activities.

Inevitable Challenges for Support Programs

Like beginning teachers themselves, teacher induction programs face some predictable challenges. These include identifying and preparing support providers, providing time for support activities, managing the relationship between support and evaluation, and securing resources for struggling teachers.

Choosing and preparing support providers. Finding teachers to serve as support providers is a constant challenge, especially if few incentives are available and support is provided by volunteers. Even when stipends are available, the dollars are rarely commensurate with the amount of time required. One California induction program attempts to generate future support providers by asking beginners to identify teachers other than their support providers who were helpful; these supportive teachers then receive certificates of appreciation along with information about becoming an official support provider. A school or district can also identify potential support providers by soliciting nominations from principals, staff developers, and teachers. Larger districts may create full-time positions for support providers, although this is expensive unless subsidized by state or federal entitlement funds or by a special grant solicited specifically to fund new-teacher support.

The selection process is further complicated by the fact that, as noted earlier, excellent classroom teachers do not always make the best support

providers for beginning teachers. In districts and schools with few opportunities for teachers to work collegially, it may be difficult to predict who has the temperament and skills to work with beginners. Another selection challenge is the uneven distribution of effective support providers across schools. Meetings between beginners and support providers are more effective when the paired teachers teach at the same grade level or in the same content area, and the meetings generally occur with greater frequency when the paired teachers are at the same school. However, it's not always possible to match both teacher focus and teacher location.

Preparation of support providers is also an issue. Typically, there is not enough time to provide all the preparation that might be desirable, so induction programs are forced to concentrate on the training believed to be most important. Some programs focus preparation on coaching skills; others focus on collecting and interpreting evidence of teaching. The most extensive preparation does both. The issue is further complicated if the induction program is expected to address a set of teaching standards, as in the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program. In that case, support providers must become familiar with the teaching standards.

Occasionally, a district finds a way to make a real financial commitment to new-teacher support. Another Arizona district has solved the "find and prepare" problem by maintaining a cadre of carefully trained master teachers, known as Instructional Program Specialists. These are classroom teachers employed on teacher contracts but deployed on "special assignment," a significant portion of which is to support new teachers through a three-year formal mentoring relationship. These specialists work directly with new teachers in their classrooms, assessing their practice and doing demonstration teaching. Their basic training covers clinical supervision, cognitive coaching, group facilitation strategies, cooperative learning, essential elements of instruction, classroom management strategies, multiple intelligences, and district curriculum standards, as well as training in various software programs aligned with district curriculum. In addition, they receive ongoing training as the curriculum is revised and new instructional materials are adopted for student use.

Providing time for support activities. Every education reform effort struggles with the issue of time. Every support activity is more likely to happen if time is provided during regular working hours or if teachers are paid for attendance. However, this imposes a tremendous logistical and financial burden on teacher induction programs. Programs manage this challenge by reserving time within the school day or with paid time for the activities deemed most important. Beginning teachers are especially busy, since they typically spend nights and weekends planning lessons. So any after-school support activities further cut into the time left for any personal life. In addition, beginning teachers need time to think about their teaching in order to grow in their craft. Induction programs must make sure that beginners' time is not filled with formal activities that have little relationship to their teaching, that leave little room for their immediate concerns, or that deny them a reasonable personal life.

Managing the relationship between beginning teacher support and beginning teacher evaluation. Beginning teacher support programs focus on improving practice. In contrast, evaluation programs focus on comparing a teacher's practice to a standard that must be met if beginners are to keep their jobs. Many believe that in fairness to new teachers, the two efforts must be kept entirely separate. Naturally, this separation precludes the principal, who is the teachers' primary evaluator, from participating closely in support efforts.

A few induction programs have successfully combined the support and evaluation of beginning

teachers. These programs provide high levels of intensive support to beginning teachers in areas that have been clearly identified to them as requiring growth. The most publicized programs — in Rochester, New York; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Poway, California — are sponsored by American Federation of Teachers affiliates.

Most induction programs, however, separate support and evaluation, due either to a belief that evaluation interferes with support or to concerns about losing union support. In keeping support and evaluation separate, confidentiality is a critical issue, requiring explicit understanding about what support providers will or will not share with principals.

In programs that separate support and evaluation, support providers can usually respond to principals' request to target assistance in a particular area, but they do not report on the perceived success of that effort. Some induction programs ask support providers and beginning teachers to keep the principal informed of general areas in which they are working, such as classroom management or lesson planning. However, when it comes to providing specific information about a beginner's practice to anyone conducting an evaluation, the mentor must refuse. And in keeping such information confidential, they must be supported by district administrators.

Whatever a school's rules about confidentiality related to teacher support, if a beginning teacher and support provider are to work together effectively, the new teacher must trust the intentions of the provider. For that reason, the beginning teacher, the support provider, and the principal must all have the same understanding of those rules from the outset.

Another area for concern relates to aligning evaluation criteria — those used by support providers to help beginning teachers improve and those used by school administrators to evaluate beginners for retention. The criteria should be the same for both purposes. Such alignment helps avoid the kind of awkward situations — and potential lawsuits — that can come about when beginning teachers receive contradictory feedback from support providers and evaluators. Both support providers and school administrators evaluating beginners should receive training aimed at developing shared understandings about the minimum criteria and standards beginners must meet as a condition of continued employment.

Getting resources to struggling teachers. While many beginners will perform adequately even with minimal assistance, some will struggle. These teachers require more support than that provided in most low-intensity strategies; in fact, even programs using high-intensity strategies will need to determine how to strategically focus support. Ideally, programs can be flexibly designed to allow some resources to be shifted from beginners who are doing fine to those who are not. In some instances, a new teacher may be so needy that a single mentor cannot fully meet his or her needs — especially if the mentor is working with multiple beginners or is working only part time as a mentor and has other responsibilities. In such cases, it may be more effective to have a mentor serve as coordinator of individualized services for the beginner, putting him or her in touch with others who can also help. Thus, in working with very needy newcomers, mentors must understand what additional resources, if any, are available. They must also understand how effective support for this population of beginning teachers differs from that for more competent newcomers.

Equally important, mentors should understand that, despite their best efforts, not all beginning teachers will be successful because, simply put, not everyone is suited to teaching. In these cases, support providers may need strategies for counseling beginning teachers out of the teaching profession.

Conclusion

School and district administrators can select strategies from those described above to create or strengthen an induction program to support beginning teachers. Whether they provide personal and emotional support, task- or problem-related support, or stimulate beginners to reflect on their teaching, all are valuable. Less intensive support strategies have been found effective at increasing retention and promoting personal and professional

well-being, but the more intensive strategies are more effective at improving beginning teaching practice.

In creating an induction program, however small, thought should also be given as to how to manage the challenges identified in this brief. While the list of issues and support strategies can be laid out in a simple, straightforward way, implementation of the strategies and management of the challenges require close attention to context and available resources. Some support strategies may reopen previously contested institutional policies and practices, such as compensation for additional work, release time priorities, and lack of professional, collegial conversations.

As with any program, the first year or so of a beginning teacher support effort is likely to be bumpy; success requires a commitment to learn from mistakes and to identify necessary changes in resources, policies, and practices. The potential payoffs — lower teacher attrition, higher teacher morale, and, most importantly, improved teaching and learning — make the effort worthwhile.

WestEd would like to hear more about schools' and districts' successful efforts, as well as their continuing challenges, in supporting beginning teachers. We would also like to know if and how you have found this brief to be helpful. Please send e-mail to <Lifelines@WestEd.org>, or write Communications at the WestEd address on the back.

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RESOURCES

American Federation of Teachers affiliate-sponsored support programs. For information about: the Rochester [New York] Teachers Association (RTA) mentor program for first-year teachers, visit the RTA Web site at <rochesterteachers.com/cit.htm>, or call Carl O'Connell at 716/262-8541; the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers' program, contact Denise Hewitt by e-mail at <hewittd@cpsboe.k-12.oh.us> or call 513/475-6042; the Poway Professional Assistance Program sponsored by the Poway Federation of Teachers, call 858/748-0010, X2324 or e-mail <ppappusd@sdcod.k-12.ca.us>.

(continued on next page)

more resources

Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment. This California program supports individuals in their first and second years of teaching through mentoring and coaching, professional development and training activities, and assessment of professional growth. For information, contact Terry Janicki with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing at 916/322-2305 or <tjanicki@ctc.ca.gov> or Suzanne Riley with the California Department of Education at 916/657-3393 or <sriley@cde.ca.gov>, or visit the BTSA Web site due on line in Spring 2000 <www.btsa.ca.gov>

Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching. Danielson, C. (1996). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. A framework of components of teaching practice, together with suggested data sources and descriptive scales to guide either self-reflection or support.

Mentoring: A resource and training guide for educators. Newton, A. et al. (1994). Stoneham, MA: WestEd. A guide and an extensive set of activities for preparing mentors to support beginning teachers, with sample two-, three-, and five-day workshops.

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Model standards for beginning teacher licensing and development: A resource for state dialogue. Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (1992). Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. A copy can be obtained by calling Jean Miller at 202/336-7048.

The New Teacher Center at University of California, Santa Cruz, offers support and assistance to school districts, universities, and other educational entities in development of teacher induction programs. For more information, call 831/459-4323 or e-mail <ntc@zzyx.ucsc.edu>.

The Pathwise Induction program, available from Educational Testing Service (ETS), is a support and formative assessment process designed to assist beginning teachers' growth as reflective practitioners. For information, contact ETS at 800/297-9051.

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